

## Message

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**Sent:** 2/16/2017 3:36:05 PM  
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**Subject:** USS Lead - Press

**East Chicago press clips****US EPA Region 5 – prepared by the Office of Public Affairs****February 16, 2017**

[http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/lake/water-donations-pour-in-for-superfund-residents/article\\_eaa0d00b-a483-5465-abc9-0acb60c19754.html](http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/lake/water-donations-pour-in-for-superfund-residents/article_eaa0d00b-a483-5465-abc9-0acb60c19754.html)

**Water donations pour in for Superfund residents**

- [Sarah Reese sarah.reese@nwi.com, 219-933-3351](mailto:sarah.reese@nwi.com) David Rodriguez helps load cases of water Wednesday outside Wanda Gordils' home in East Chicago. Rodriguez, who also serves as president of the city's Puerto Rican parade committee, and others were helping to deliver donated water to residents in East Chicago's USS Lead Superfund site.

EAST CHICAGO — Volunteers stacked up dozens of cases of bottled water Wednesday on the steps outside Wanda Gordils' basement as they prepared to deliver them to residents in the USS Lead Superfund site.

Wanda Gordils, who is leading the Community Strategy Group's drinking water distribution effort, said volunteers have been delivering water to residents every day for about a month.

Many of the donations have been pouring in from Porter County, she said. The Blue Valpo group has been taking donations in Valparaiso, and Discovery Charter School in Chesterton recently dropped off a donation, Gordils said.

This week, Blue Valpo dropped off 280 cases they collected.

The group previously delivered water throughout zones 1 and 2 of the residential cleanup area, and volunteers hoped to complete deliveries Wednesday to remaining residents in zones 2 and 3.

Volunteers have dropped off two cases of water per household, but on Wednesday planned to drop off three cases each, she said.

Frank Szczepanski, of Blue Valpo, said water drive organizers estimated about 1,000 cases of water will be needed daily to meet the needs of residents in the Superfund site, including those who are not being forced to leave the 1,000 properties in zones 2 and 3.

The water drive is focused only on residents within the Superfund site, which includes all of East Chicago's Calumet neighborhood. That's because those residents face a greater risk of exposure to lead: through their soil, their water and — because most homes were built before 1978 — through old lead paint inside in their homes.

Officials have said up to 90 percent of the water lines in East Chicago could be lead, and EPA has recommended anyone on the city water system use a certified filter on their taps. Lead in the water is not related to lead in the soil.

The Environmental Protection Agency began excavating lead- and arsenic-contaminated soil from around homes in the middle and eastern parts of the neighborhood — dubbed zones 2 and 3. Residents in those areas have not been told to relocate.

EPA last summer shelved plans to excavate soil at the West Calumet Housing Complex, which was built in the footprint of an old lead smelter, and Carrie Gosch Elementary School after the city ordered complex residents to move out. About 100 families remained in the complex as of Friday, officials said.

Lead levels of up to approximately 91,000 parts per million were found in the most extreme case in the complex. The EPA cleans up residential properties with lead levels of more than 400 ppm.

Gordils is accepting water donations Monday, Thursday and Saturday mornings at her home in East Chicago.

Blue Valpo also is accepting donated cases of 12-ounce bottles from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday at St. Teresa of Avila Catholic Student Center, 1511 Laporte Ave., Valparaiso.

Organizers are looking to expand drop-off sites in Lake and Porter counties, Szczepanski said. For more information on how to help, call Gordils at 219-218-2737 or Szczepanski at 219-840-0007.

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[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/east-chicago-lead-mike-pence\\_us\\_58a4b76fe4b07602ad5128c9](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/east-chicago-lead-mike-pence_us_58a4b76fe4b07602ad5128c9)

Mike Pence Ignored A Lead Contamination Crisis In His Backyard

**Indiana didn't take serious action on East Chicago's lead problem till the vice president left the governorship.**

02/16/2017 05:45 am ET

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Joseph Erbentraut Senior Reporter, The Huffington Post

Pence said no, suggesting the \$200,000 in assistance the state had already offered to help the city relocate affected families and administer free lead testing would suffice.

Pence's successor, fellow Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb, disagreed. Last week, in one of his first executive orders in office, he issued a declaration of disaster emergency that paved the way for additional state and potentially federal assistance for the struggling city and tasked Copeland with providing a written assessment of what resources the city will need to help its residents by March 5.

Deborah Chizewer, a law fellow at Northwestern University's Environmental Advocacy Clinic who has been assisting East Chicago residents affected by the toxic, lead-contaminated soil, said Holcomb's action was a welcome change from Pence's response to the crisis.

"I was obviously very disappointed that Pence didn't give this situation the requisite level of attention," Chizewer told The Huffington Post. "I don't think the state has done enough, but I was very pleased to see that Holcomb recognized the urgency in East Chicago that remains."

The situation in East Chicago dates back at least to 1972, when the West Calumet housing complex was built on the site of a former lead refinery.

Concerns about lead in the soil in the area began around 1991, when the state first began testing East Chicago children for lead exposure. It wasn't until 2009 that a 322-acre area, including the complex, was declared a Superfund site.

Testing of the area's soil first confirmed to residents last year that it was contaminated with both lead and arsenic.

Cleanup of lead-contaminated homes in the predominantly low-income, minority-populated city began last summer. Section 8 housing vouchers for residents affected by the city's plan to demolish the complex were distributed shortly thereafter, but many residents have struggled to find alternative housing using those vouchers. According to CBS Chicago, some 157 families of 332 living in the complex have yet to relocate as of this month.

The city's lead crisis was the subject of a longform HuffPost video, titled "Dear Mike Pence," released last December.

In the piece, East Chicago residents living inside the Superfund site's three impacted zones express frustration that it took health officials so long to make them aware of the dangers of lead in their community.

One East Chicago resident, Mauro Jimenez, described to video producer Matthew Perkins how the EPA visited his family's house about six years earlier.

"They came here and took samples out of my yard," Jimenez told Perkins. "They never did say for what. They never sent it to me. They sent it to me this year, giving me the numbers of lead and arsenic too. Why did they hold that information from us?"

Jimenez, along with his wife Sara, is a homeowner essentially trapped in the affected area, unable to sell his home due to the lead.

"In good conscience, because they had small children, I couldn't even sell them the house because we're all contaminated here," Sara told Perkins.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has said no blood lead level in children should be considered safe. Exposure to lead has been linked with developmental delays, learning difficulties and other problems.

Residents of East Chicago, Indiana, like Nayesa Walker (center top) and her children were asked to leave their homes as testing has revealed high levels of lead and arsenic in their soil.

Since the HuffPost piece was filmed, advocates for the residents say the situation has gotten more serious. The Environmental Protection Agency discovered elevated lead levels in the drinking water of 40 percent of area homes that were recently tested. The EPA advised residents to use water filters.

That's also the advice that Marc Edwards, a whistleblower in the Flint, Michigan, water crisis, offered for residents of the Indiana city. Edwards told HuffPost the city should also recommend that residents living in homes with lead pipes switch to bottled water, implement lead-corrosion control strategies and remind children to wash their hands to reduce their exposure to lead dust and soil.

A city spokesman did not respond to a request for information concerning the city's action plan on lead. An Indiana Department of Environmental Management pointed only to the text of last week's emergency declaration in response to a request for additional comment.

For her part, Chizewer hopes the state may move to provide water filters to residents to help them reduce their exposure to lead, a problem she admits will not be an easy or cheap fix.

The ongoing crisis in Flint, to which some have likened East Chicago's troubles, is evidence, she says, of just that.

"It can't be fixed overnight," Chizewer said. "This is a cleanup of hundreds of properties. It's going to take years, but I hope there is a concerted effort to clean the properties up as quickly as possible."

Sincerely,

Steven P. Kaiser  
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